

Patrick Murphy, the Alabama Crimson Tide softball coach, says, "Un-coachable kids become unemployable adults. Let your kid get used to someone being tough on them. It's life—get over it." Most of my lifelong inner circle of close friends come from my experiences in sports. Nothing matches the camaraderie and heartfelt highs and lows that sports competition leaves etched in the hearts and minds of players, coaches, and fans. And sports logos are a very important part of those memories.

It's the same for Natives who live and breathe the Native rodeo culture. They always notice when someone is wearing cowboy boots or a cowboy hat. And they can quickly pick out the phony "urban cowboys." As a one-time bull rider myself, I always pay extra attention to those wearing a cowboy hat. A cowboy hat is a very important symbol to those in the rodeo culture—something most people wouldn't understand. Likewise, a leather motorcycle vest is not just another leather vest. A motorcycle vest and the patches that riders attach to their vests are a very important part of the biker culture—and I'm not talking about motorcycle gangs. I'm talking about thousands of passionate individual riders like myself. People who are serious motorcycle riders will know exactly what I mean.

Those who are obsessed with political correctness won't get this, but I continue to see Rez kids and adults wearing caps with the Cleveland Indians logo. They don't wear the logo because they are Cleveland Indians fans, or even because they are baseball fans. They wear it because it's a Native logo, and they like it!

The first question I have for Natives who are upset about the use of Native names and images in sports is, Are you even a real sports fan? If you were a real sports fan, you would realize a sports logo is a very serious emblem and is one of the highest honours in sports. It symbolizes your team and is the face and image of your team. In sports

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From Rez Rules
Chief Clarence Louis

your team logo and name becomes part of your *family*, which is something non-sports fans would not understand. Your team and that jersey and name is of utmost importance, respect, and a source of pride.

I wonder how many of those Natives who oppose the use of names such as Cleveland Indians, Chicago Blackhawks, and Washington Redskins spend significant time on their Rez and take notice of how many of their people wear those logos? Are they urban Indian academics caught up in campus or Facebook political correctness? I notice Redskins, Blackhawks, and Indians ball caps on reserves and reservations all over Indian Country. I even see some of these logos at powwows, where Native craft vendors will often sell beaded "Redskins" logos.

Obviously, Natives (like every race of people) don't all agree on every issue. As with every race, Natives have a variety of positions on most every aspect of life. The public and team owners should realize that, yes, there are some Natives against the use of Native logos and names, but also that the media loves to play up conflict. The fact is, there are a lot of Natives who proudly wear and support those logos every day.

Some Natives say the Washington Redskins name is offensive, but most Rezskins are not thin-skinned and don't take offence. On the Rez we have far more pressing economic, social, and cultural issues to deal with than this, and we don't have time to listen to those who make the issue of Native sports logos and names an ongoing priority. On my visits to more than three hundred Indian reserves and reservations, not once has a Rez Indian brought up the so-called serious issue of Native sports names and logos.

I side with the skins and have ever since I was a kid. I will continue to support and wear the Blackhawks, Redskins, and Cleveland Indians logos. The first hockey jersey I bought, back in 1976 when as a sixteen-year-old I started playing hockey, was a Chicago Blackhawks practice

jersey, with the proud-looking Indian head on the front and my personal sports number, #13, on the back. That jersey is still one of my prized sports jerseys. I am not even a Blackhawks fan—Habs all the way!—but I see that Indian head as one of the very best logos in all of professional sports. To me and to many First Nations people, that logo is a sign of RESPECT. For Natives, how can it be anything other than something in which to take pride? No way is it degrading or embarrassing!

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), an organization that, like many reserves, lives off of government funding, recently sent out a notice: “CBC Sports will stop the use of Indigenous names in reference to teams and symbols.” What a worthless gesture. Come on, CBC! If you want to help First Nations people, try reporting every day on the ongoing injustices of land claims, water quality, and treaty issues. Why not call out the churches and the Pope for more than a century of physical and sexual abuse in Indian residential and boarding schools? Or is that subject too close to the Canadian and American heartbeat?

I recently received an email from a senior men’s hockey team a few hours east of Osoyoos. The players were getting beat up on social media for using the name “Warriors” and wearing the Blackhawks logo. I told them, “You are in my traditional Okanagan/Sylix territory, and as far as I am concerned, keep on wearing that proud Native logo. Tell those overly sensitive pilgrims to find a more important cause to protest. Tell them, ‘Why not change the imperial/colonial/settler “white names” of all the mountains, rivers, and creeks back to Native names?’” Especially those on Rezes named after racist Indian agents and forts. Fort names and settler names should be changed.

In 2020 the Black Lives Matter demonstrations happened all over the United States and Canada—which was long overdue. It was great to see players taking a knee during the playing of the national anthem.

Taking a knee does not mean you disrespect the flag or are not patriotic. Some people purposely misinterpret things for their own political purposes—just like the idea that wearing and using Native sports logos and names is being racist or insensitive to Native people.

The Edmonton Eskimos of the Canadian Football League also recently bowed to the pressure of political correctness and decided to drop the familiar “Eskimo” from their name, as this term is no longer used to describe the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic. Jordan Tootoo, the first Inuk to make it to the NHL, responded to this decision brilliantly:

... My father's generation connects [with] this term to describe who they are. He would refer to himself as an Eskimo. My generation refers to itself as Inuk. What is important to me is that people understand this... So, this makes me ask the question, does the term Eskimo for the Edmonton franchise bring back feelings of oppression for the Inuk people? For me, it does not. That is not a reason to keep the name. There could be others for whom it does create those feelings. I encourage the franchise to explain why they chose the name Eskimos in the first place. Was it racially charged, or, was it because of admiration for the ability of the Eskimos to thrive in cold climates, for their mental and physical toughness and for their resilience? My point is that context really does matter....

As a Native person, and especially a Native sports fan, would you rather see our people wearing team logos and names that have no connection at all to Native culture and history? Not likely. One wise Elder from the States asked me, “Will the general public remember us Native people more if Native sports logos go away?” He shook his head and said, “Images—art—remind people.”